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Government Computer

January 1998

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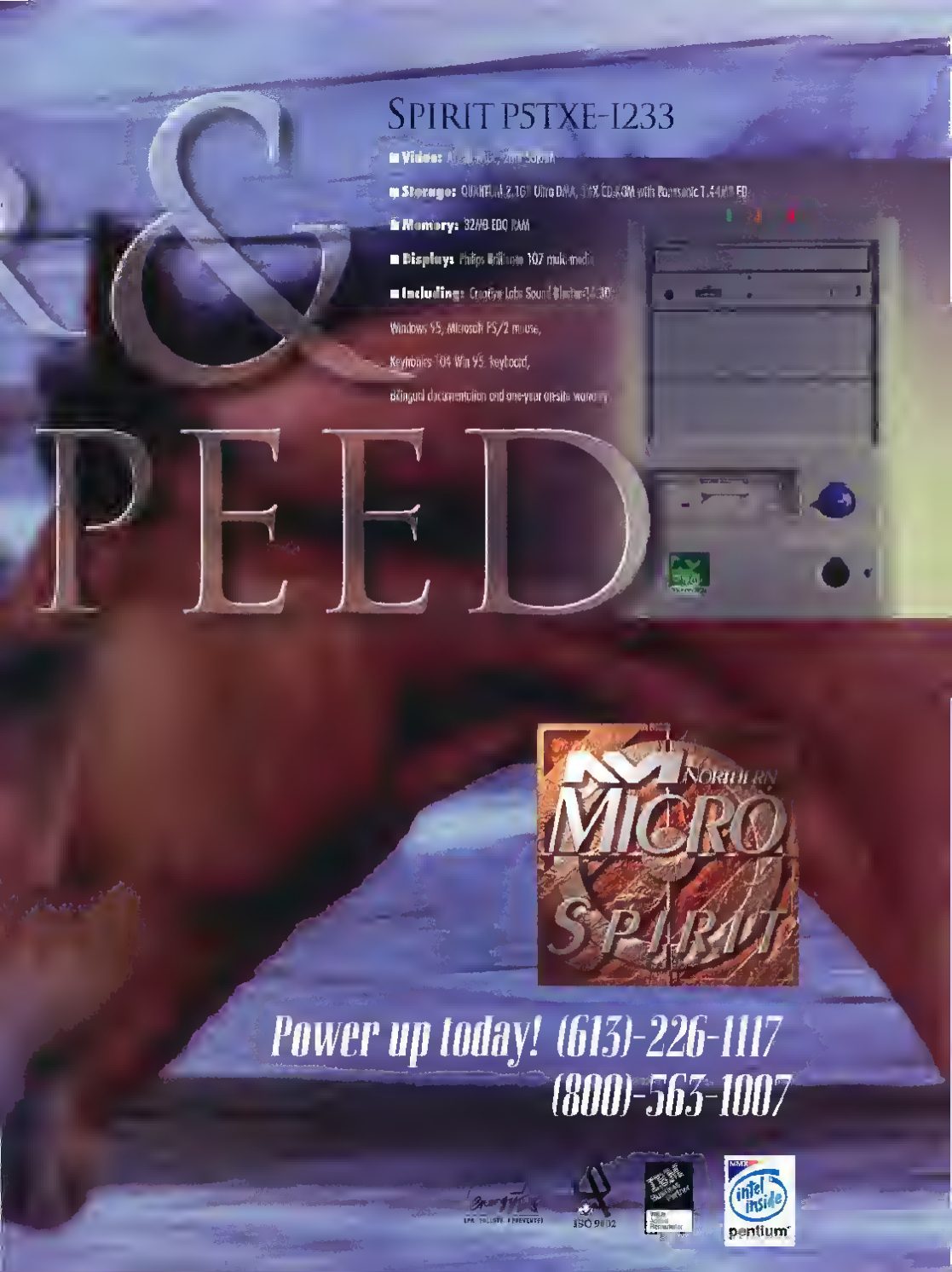
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Interview — **GTIS Phil McLellan interview**

Phil Mclellan, assistant deputy minister for Government Telecommunications and Informatics Services (GTIS) spoke recently with Government Computer about his organisation changing mandate ..... Page 28

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In this issue we introduce a new columnist - Thomas B. Riley. His company, Riley Information Services, specialises in the creation of public policy on information issues ..... Page 42

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When IT planning is less than perfect you can often trace the problem back to the lack of a solid departmental business strategy ..... Page 46

Government Computer



Cover

Year 2000 Countdown

With the millenium less than two years away IT people throughout Ottawa are scrambling to avoid a potential meltdown. James Careless looks at how three departments are handling the problem.

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Feature

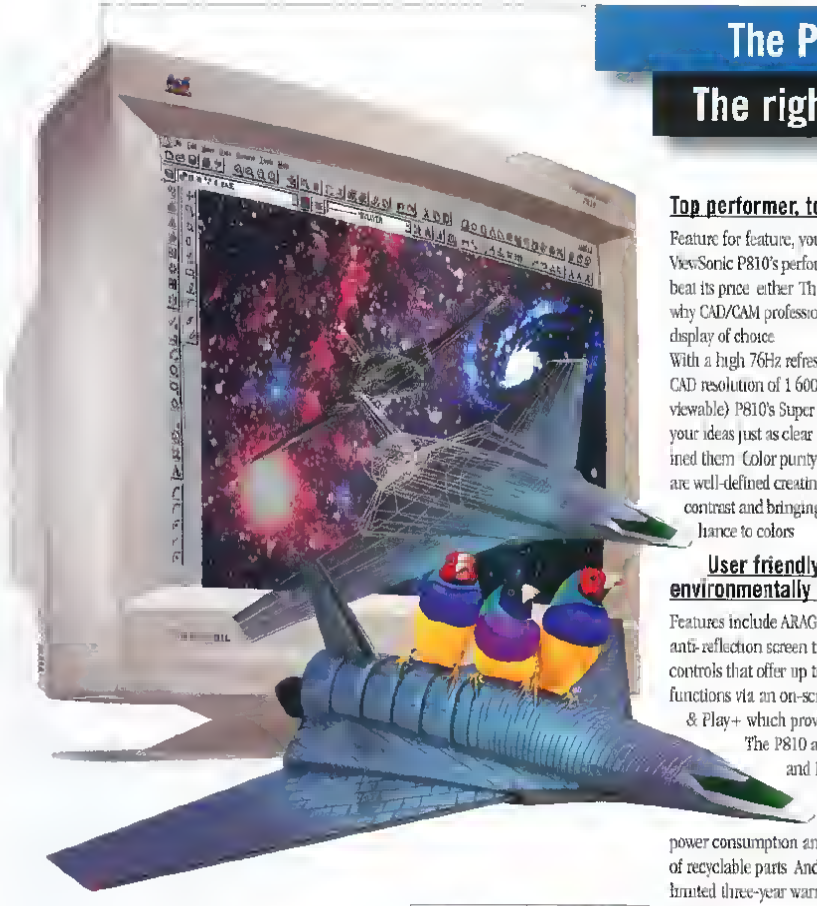
Year 2000

A time for triage:
what to fix when you can't fix everything

The Year 2000 crisis has escalated to the point where the vast majority of businesses and government departments are physically unable to fix all of the errors in their computer systems. The solution may be to refocus your team's efforts.

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The mark of the Beast

Not 666 but 99

by Lee Hunter

Will all hell break loose on January 1, 2000? Not exactly. According to many experts hell will certainly break loose but it won't take two years for government systems to feel the heat. In fact many systems will fail in the next twelve months and it's possible that on January 1, 1999 we will witness more crashes than will be seen at the millennium.

Event horizons

One of many common myths about the Year 2000 bug is that systems need to be debugged and tested prior to December 31, 1999. This is what is called an event horizon', the last date that an application will function correctly.

But different applications can have a variety of event horizons. For example, forward looking programs, like those that handle five year budgets, were at risk three years ago, some of your software may have problems at the end of the next fiscal year, whereas other systems won't have a date-related hangover till New Year's Day, 2000.

However there is a widespread and very much under-reported bug specific to the year 1999 which could catch your organisation completely off guard.

For many years programmers have been treating 99 in a date field in a special way. As Data Dimensions reports in its online publication Millennium Journal, "The digit '9', used in data singly or as a series of nines, since the beginning of data processing, has held special meanings. The meanings could be end of record, end of file, error return, cancellation, start, special discounts, missing date, or keep forever, to name a few. In some cases, the conditional nine is included in the programming language itself to have special meaning. In fact, '9' is the most frequently used element to mean transfer of logic." One organisation was even reported to be using '99' to flag records that could be destroyed!

Some programs have data validation rules that require a date to be entered. Often they will accept 1/1/99 in the date field but will treat that entry as a signal that the user has, for some reason, chosen not to enter a valid date.

And the worst of the problem is that organisations that are only beginning to get a handle on the Y2K bug haven't even begun to consider the '99 bug', even though the event horizon will hit them at least a year earlier.

Some Y2K experts have set September of this year as the drop dead deadline for identifying and fixing the Y2K bug. This would provide a full year of testing (with a little breathing room) before the millennium arrives.

If you apply the same kind of time line to the much more pressing 99 bug you can see why I say that all hell is about to break loose in the coming year.

Is it warm in here or is it just me?

Lee Hunter is managing editor of Government Computer and president of Hum Communications Ltd. He can be reached at editor@govcomp.com. More information on the '99 bug' is available at www.data-dimensions.com/html/MILJ45.htm. We also recommend the book Managing 00, Surviving the Year 2000 Computing Crisis by Peter de Jager and Richard Bergeon (John Wiley and Sons, ISBN: 0-471-17937-X), available from the Government Computer Bookstore (613-789-6431).

The Magazine of Technology Solutions for Canada's Public Sector

Government Computer

Volume 3 Number 1

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RDIMS controversy *continues*



I read with interest the article Scanning the Horizon in your November 1997 edition

I was especially interested in Michael Sutton's comments about the Treasury Board of Canada's ambitious undertaking in evaluating imaging, document/records management and workflow solutions (RDIMS RFP)

Having worked with Michael, and having read his book on document management, I do admire him But having worked on several of the RDIMS RFP responses, I can write that he over estimated in quoting costs of $3,000 to $5,000 a seat. The license fee per seat is substantially lower Taking into account the number of seats referred to in the bid, I agree with him that the overall cost is still substantial, and probably well over the government's budget allocations

Treasury Board faced two issues in completing it's RDIMS effort The first issue is the fast pace of change in technology versus the time required for intensive review and decision making needed to properly conclude such studies By the time choices were made, the components that comprised the integrated solutions proposed had been upgraded two or three times New solutions have since been brought to market which deliver far superior functionality, and at lower cost The bid responses were outdated before the Treasury Board could publish their conclusion

The second issue is universal need compared to specific need. Despite the fact that I had represented the manufacturer of one of the key components of the favoured solution, I could not honestly claim that the software was the perfect choice for all government branches In fact, I know that in several branches, the products offered by competitors offered much better solutions. As a consultant, I can more readily offer this opinion but as a software representative, I had to work within the confines of the process, and for the success of the company I represented

Regarding Michael Sutton's view on the government's document management requirements, I hold his opinion in high regard, although I maintain a different view of the issues Where Michael emphasizes the importance of document storage (an important issue in managing information in an enterprise such as the federal government) I emphasize the management of information processes, the control of work based on moving, using, and reusing information This is the essence of turning data into information, and then into knowledge Where Michael emphasizes the role of records management and classification for reliable and secure access to information, which I see as a vertical solution, I emphasize the process control and workflow, passing information cross the enterprise, which I see as a horizontal solution. I believe the government needs to consider both views, and needs to incorporate both solutions.

There is, as yet, no single solution that delivers the functionality needed by all government departments And, no single solution should be purchased by the government as a universal solution The Treasury Board's RDIMS effort should result in a set of interoperable standards on which IT managers would base their technology decisions Rather than looking to implement a single, universal solution, the Treasury Board should guide IT managers in implementing solutions that can share information (and electronic documents) with other systems implemented by government departments The systems selected should provide the best functionality to meet the vertical requirements of individual branches, while meeting the government's universal, horizontal requirements as laid out in the Treasury Board's integration standards

I hope that government departments looking to take advantage of the funds budgeted for acquisition of the RDIMS solution, take into account both views before proceeding.

Steven Birnam
Senior Consultant
(former Regional Sales Manager, PC DOCS Canada)

Scanning the Horizon

[GC Nov 97]

I would like to clarify the context of some of my statements for your readers

I have been interviewed by Paul Weinberg in the past, and I respect him as an excellent reporter However, keep in mind that Paul and I talked over coffee for almost 2 hours So, I said a lot and he only had room in his article for a tiny bit of what was discussed Therefore there was very little room to the build up to the context of what I may have been trying to say Nonetheless, he reported my quotes factually, accurately, and without prejudice, and certainly could not anticipate how others, (especially in Ottawa), could interpret (or misinterpret!!) my words

I have been one of the opponents to the RDIMS initiative from the beginning I understand that one of the goals of the initiative was to try to rationalize the purchasing power of the federal government

Continued on page 10

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Letters to the Ed.

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through the overall selection of one suite of products but I never felt it was worth the investment considering

1) the emergence of the Internet instead of client/server as the platform of choice
2) the amount of time it would take to complete an evaluation
3) the fact that the evaluation would be superceded by new versions of all the separate products and brand new products before the negotiations were completed with the supplier of choice
4) the existence of such diverse business types in the federal government that one suite of products could satisfy all the organizations
5) the availability (at the time the initiative began), of the DMA and ODMA specifications for interoperability
6) the detailed level of granularity and minutiae involved in the evaluation
7) the fact the the Federal Government in the USA has never been able to do this type of evaluation

Now, let's look at exactly what I was quoted as saying, and the context that might help explain my remarks

Quote # 1

p 33, "Treasury Board's specifications, Sutton says, are 'rigid and too expensive, costing $3 000 to $5,000 a seat [for software licenses]."

Nothing significant is likely to happen ... "They are no further ahead because they do not have the money," he says

Paul and I were discussing the 2+ years of time that went into delaying a decision for many departments as the evaluation took place and the negotiations dragged on (The Treasury Board RFI began in 1995) Many departments (by waiting) had missed opportunities to select and implement products over two or three years ago They had lost the money for software, network upgrades, and hardware acquisitions to prepare to run RDIMS, along with the consulting services dollars that would have been used to select, implement a system, and train the users

My crude calculations would lead me to suggest that this would increase the cost per seat substantially, and I estimated "3,000-5,000" per software seat (including software, hardware and network) because of the lost $$ opportunity cost.

Quote # 2

p 33, <<If the board (sic) had paid attention to the loosening of the proprietary standards in the technology and allowed for more flexibility in the product choice, the prices might have instead been "$500 to $600 for a seat for document management and another $300 to $400 for records management."

I stick by the first part of the statement totally, (e.g., when I joined the specification groups at their inception - 1994/95 - I was the only Canadian member for almost 9 months) You mentioned DMA and ODMA in your editorial of the issue I am quoted in These specifications eventually made their way into the RFP, but by their very nature made the RFP obsolete since any DMA "enabled" package could retrieve documents from any other DMA "enabled" repository One, and only one product, was not necessary to impose interoperability

As for the second part of the statement, the figures I suggested were what I felt departments could have paid for these two components on a per seat basis over two to three years ago I may not have properly emphasized this point with Paul They would have been much further ahead than they are now since funds would not have been lost at the end of the fiscal years and they could now consider workflow, imaging, etc

Other Quotes

They stand as quoted, and express my personal and professional opinion.

PS The article also notes that a [Treasury Board Secretariat] person was unavailable for comments I would like to know why Treasury Board would not get involved in such an important article. Someone should have been out front with a flag indicating the Treasury Board position to help balance the reporting of the article I do not know why National Archives of Canada was not contacted; but I had suggested Revenue Canada as a successful implementation of an EDMS/RM application When Paul called Revenue Canada he mentioned that he had been told that they were not interested in being quoted or reported on!!!! This is too bad, since it would lend credence to the fact that there are successful initiatives underway

Information I have received from a number of sources leads me to believe that the negotiations are complete and the contract has been signed off by the TBS project team and the supplier Though protracted, the contract is on the verge of receiving ministerial approval. I am unsure of the finally negotiated price per seat for all the components of RDIMS, but have been lead to believe that it is on average $750 (plus or minus 15%, depending upon the number of seats negotiated with the supplier) Interested parties may wish to contact Susan Hall (941-9480) at TBS to receive a specific quote

I stand by my quotes and comments with the qualifications I have provided above. I sincerely apologize if my remarks have cased any anxiety I would like to see the RDIMS initiative, or alternatives, underway in the departments and agencies before the Federal Year 2000 initiative overshadows RDIMS in the allocation and absorption of IT budgets for the next two to three years.

Michael J.D. Sutton,
Adm.A, CMC, ISP, MIT
Partner, Document Engineering
FMP/Flaman Mngmnt Partners Ltd.

[Michael Sutton is author of Document Management for the Enterprise Principles, Techniques, and Applications, published by John Wiley & Sons]

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Accessible information in Atlantic Canada

Personal Property Registry enables direct interaction with government

Compiled by Lee Hunter

Unisys Corp's Information Services Group has announced the launch of Atlantic Canada On-Line (ACOL) in partnership with the governments of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland

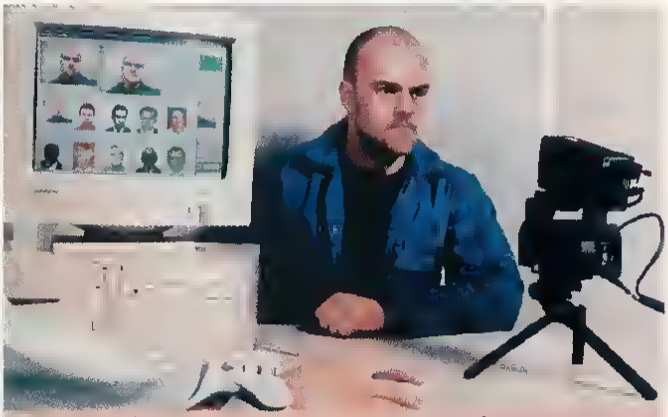
The company says the service provides the cornerstone to the governments' strategy of improving access to government information, resulting in increased client satisfaction, and efficient management of government resources It is the result of an agreement signed by the four provinces of Atlantic Canada and Unisys in May 1996

During the past two years, Unisys and the Nova Scotia Department of Housing and Municipal Affairs worked to develop and implement a new electronic registry as defined in the new Personal Property Security Act (PPSA)

The project provides for transition from a paper based, labour-intensive registry to a new electronic registry accessible through ACOL

Clients of the registry are now able to register and search information from remote locations, such as their offices and homes. ACOL offers the electronic commerce infrastructure that enables clients to complete registry transactions, including the seamless and secure transfer of electronic funds from client accounts to the appropriate government accounts

Continued on page 14



Security camera recognises disguised faces

A UK computer company has launched a surveillance system that can recognise a face from a crowd captured on a security camera, even if the person is disguised Known as Mandrake the system was developed by Software and Systems International (SSI)

The technique is based on advances in neural network technology in which an ordinary computer is programmed and trained to behave as if it were a network of simple human brain cells

To pick out a person among a crowd captured on a closed-circuit television screen, Mandrake is capable of searching 250 images a second in an existing database of facial images of known persons, from which it compares and identifies the targeted person by matching key facial features It ignores hairstyles, facial hair, glasses and jewellery and can recognise the face from different angles

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GC Updates

Continued from page 12

David Wagner president and CEO of Unisys Canada and Housing Minister Guy Brown hosted the launch

The ACOL system is designed to provide on-line access by government clients to government databases, and the Personal Property Registry for Nova Scotia is the first of many applications.

"Unisys is committed to helping Atlantic Canada On-Line offer its customers improved access to government services and information," said David Wagner, Unisys Canada president and chief executive officer "Through joint efforts and by capitalising on the latest technology, we anticipate a number of other applications to be up-and-running within the next several months"

When personal property — cars, mobile homes, furniture, airplanes, etc — is used as security for a financial arrangement between a borrower and a lender, supporting documents are filed with the Personal Property Registry

Prior to the new system all information at the registry was paper based and could only be accessed on a county by county basis via an actual visit to a county registry office. This process resulted in a fragmented, cumbersome and costly processing system

With the new system, the registry maintains a database of information about personal property Clients are electronically directed to the institution or individual holding the security documents, eliminating the need to manually maintain actual documents within the registry.

This new system will streamline operations and make it easier for businesses and citizens to access information

"It's a whole new way of doing business The new Personal Property Registry, through ACOL is both a technology solution as well as a reform of the legislation and business processes in the Personal Property Registry," said Brown

"It provides an electronic province-wide registry instead of the old system of 18 paper-centred, county-based registries It will reduce the time and effort required to register information using a manual process, formerly taking days or weeks, to one that takes just minutes or hours.

"The new registry exemplifies this government s approach of employing technology in an effective manner, to improve efficiencies and provide quality service to the corporate and consumer communities of this province," Brown added.

In Nova Scotia, the Department of Business and Consumer Services is responsible for leading the government's partnership with ACOL.

"This announcement is solid evidence that the ACOL- government partnership is working," said Business and Consumer Services Minister Wayne Gaudet "Our department has a mandate to make business and individual dealings with government easier, and the registry will certainly do that."

It is anticipated the registry will evolve into an Atlantic regional system where the four provincial governments will operate within a similar legislative, technological and business framework.

This cooperative approach is unprecedented in inter provincial jurisdictions, and responds to the needs expressed by the financial and legal communities

ACOL is delivered by Unisys and a consortium of partners including CorporaTel, a client support center organisation, and Software Kinetics, a software engineering company

In-house IT projects at risk

When compared with contract projects audited in the past, federal in-house information technology projects were better aligned with departmental

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Axworthy launches landmine site

Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy has launched a Internet site to provide information about the anti personnel mine issue and the conference Canada hosted in Ottawa last December, at which more than 100 countries signed a treaty banning these weapons

"One of the hallmarks of the Ottawa Process has been its openness and transparency This Web site reflects that theme by providing open and accessible information on the global efforts to ban landmines and on the Treaty Signing Conference People connecting on-line with this conference can witness, in real time, as the global community takes a forceful step toward eliminating landmines forever," said Axworthy

The Web site address for Safe Lane is http://www.mines.gc.ca

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Year 2000 countdown

A tale of three departments

By James Careless

The Year 2000 (Y2K) problem: it's a challenge that needs no introduction to government computer professionals. With the millennium less than two years away, IT people throughout Ottawa are scrambling to avoid a potential Y2K data meltdown.

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At the head of their efforts is the Treasury Board Secretariat, which established the Chief Information Officer Year 2000 Project Office in 1996. The Project Office is helping all government agencies and departments find common solutions to the Y2K problem, as well as keeping an eye on how each is doing with its own Y2K efforts.

So how well is the process doing? Well, Ross Hutchison, President of the IT consulting firm Ross Hutchinson and Associates, has his doubts. "My concern would be that there's been a lot of planning, but not enough action," says Hutchison, "and that they're well behind the eight-ball and they know it."

Echoing his concerns is Ross Graham, Vice President of EDS Canada's Government Services Division. Although he cites Revenue Canada as "having made some pretty good progress", Graham says "others are quite a bit behind the power curve, and some unfortunately are not yet even fully aware how far behind they are."

Making things worse, of course, is the fact that many programs have to be Y2K compliant by the start of 1999, simply because their software automatically projects a year ahead. All told, it's a difficult and unprecedented challenge that faces federal IT managers, one that may cost up to a billion dollars to solve.

Lining up behind the eight ball

Of course in any line - even behind an eight-ball - there are those at the front, and others at the back. Getting those at the rear to acknowledge their position publicly is usually near impossible. However, the front-runners are typically more open.

As acknowledged by Graham, one of the front-runners is Revenue Canada. It started implementing four-digit dates as far back as 1990, says Dick Sansom, the department's Director General of Development Support. "We probably got an easier start on it than most other departments because a lot of our systems are centered on large databases," he explains. "Because of the large information files we maintain, we got into four-digit standards relatively early."

As well, "the nature of our operations is that our systems get regular maintenance changes and upgrades each year, sometimes even three to four times a year," Sansom adds. "In addition to having more up-to-date software covering many functions, this means that we have a group of maintenance programmers working with our systems who are quite familiar with them."

> **We've been able to make Year 2000 changes during regular scheduled maintenance. We don't have to go on a special binge to find moldy old code no-one's worked with for years and years.**

"This means we've been able to make Year 2000 changes during regular scheduled maintenance. We don't have to go on a special binge to find moldy old code no-one's worked with for years and years."

Still, even Revenue Canada has its Y2K soft spots. First, even with its attention to software, "there are still systems designed way back in the 1970s in use, when space was a very precious thing, and you saved every last bit you could by using two-digit dating," says Sansom.

Second, the types of such systems that most concern him are those created by third-party vendors, some of which are no longer in business. For instance, part of the GST taxation system relies on an obsolete program called "Gamma", which is not even sold anymore, let alone Y2K-compatible. However, Sansom isn't too worried, because "we recognized this problem a year or so ago, and we've built into our plans a rewrite of its COBOL coding."

Third, there's the issue of testing, to make sure the rewrites actually work. Right now Revenue Canada has upgraded about half its systems, but finding space to test the software is no mean feat. The department's IT section does have some hardware set aside for such tests, but still it's not quite the same thing as running the software on the actual mainframe, to find any last bugs. So although Dick Sansom expects his people to reach their January 1, 1999 deadline comfortably, there's still the nagging issue of how well things will work once 2000 actually arrives.

A second department well into its Y2K conversion is Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), whose responsibilities include Employment Insurance and Old Age Pension cheques. Like Revenue Canada, this department has been working on the Y2K problem for well over a year, says Gary Depew, Director-General of HRDC's Year 2000 Project.

The first thing HDRC did in tackling the Y2K problem was to begin "assessing of all our code," says Depew. This was no small task: checking the department's 70 'mission-critical' programs required filtering "about 18 million lines of code". Of these, "about eight percent will require someone to look at it," he says.

Based on what he's seen so far, Depew admits that HRDC's Y2K problem is "bigger than what we had anticipated." But he believes that the processes that have been put in place, combined with what has been learned to date, will allow HRDC to hit its January 1999 target. This is for the department's 'mission-critical' programs only, however. As for the 120 'non-critical' programs? Gary Depew expects that work on some of them will continue past the turn of the millennium.

Like Sansom, Depew's biggest concern is testing and verification. "And even when this is completed, one of the biggest things that will remain is the tremendous amount of implementation that will have to be done." Meanwhile, at Statistics Canada, substantial progress has been made in putting together Y2K solutions, says Barbara Slater, Director-General of the Informatics Branch. "We've got virtually all our assessment and analysis com-

Continued on page 20

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Year 2000

Continued from page 18

plete, and we expect to have all of our mission- critical programs into compliance by the end of August, 1998, and fully tested by the end of that year."

However Stats Can still has other Y2K concerns, mainly with the data it receives from a host of outside sources. This is why it's critical for the department to ensure "that our partners are also taking appropriate actions to deal with Y2K," says Slater. "This, of course, adds to the complexity of our task, particularly because these outside sources are not directly under our control."



Helping find good help: PWGSC

Finding the right kind of Y2K help is going to be an increasing challenge as the Millennium approaches. That's because the Law of 'Supply and Demand' will apply as time runs out, more and more managers will start clamouring for Y2K contractors. This means the supply will get tighter, and costs will go up - not exactly the kind of scenario any time-driven, cost-conscious government IT manager wants to think about. In an effort to ease the situation, Public Works and Government Services Canada has drawn up an RFP designed to make things easier. The goal is to allow government departments to do their external Y2K procurement just once, says PWGSC Informatics Procurement Director Sharon Chamberlain.

"We want to identify suppliers who will be able to take on the full scope of the challenges," she says. To make it worth their while, PWGSC has set aside $1 million in guaranteed work for accepted suppliers. In other words, by signing on, each of them has been promised a predetermined share of this pot as a minimum fee, with the potential to make more money as the situation allows.

It's a form of 'retainer', designed to ensure that external Y2K suppliers remain committed to the government as the demand for their services from the private sector grows. (To this end, PWGSC is also willing to renegotiate fee schedules with these companies from time to time, to make sure that Ottawa remains as attractive a customer as the TD bank.)

Ironically, it's the private sector who told PWGSC that such a cash commitment was critical to meeting Ottawa's Y2K goals. "Industry here in Canada told us that if the government wanted to have access to these type of resources we had to stand up and be counted," says Chamberlain. "And this is what this RFP is all about."

However, there is a caveat. This RFP is intended to cover "mission-critical" government functions only, rather than the whole range of Ottawa's IT functions. Included in the list of critical functions is food inspection, transfer payments to provinces and territories, employment insurance and pensions, public sector payroll, and weather forecasting. Should the demand for Y2K contractors exceed the supply, it's these IT functions which will get first call on what's available.

Will we make it?

The big question, of course, is will the federal government succeed in its Y2K efforts, or will the whole system come crashing down?

The likely outcome, according to EDS Canada's Ross Graham, will be a bit of both. "I don't believe as it stands that we're going to escape unscathed here," he predicts. "I think that there's going to be some systems that will fail, and some systems that will not perform the way they should, and that's going to cause some significant problems for us."

Who makes it - and who doesn't - will probably effect the fates of many IT careers in the public sector for years to come. That's why the Y2K problem is so critical for government IT managers, because it won't just affect the people relying on these systems but also the reputations of those in charge of them.

More information about the federal government's Y2K efforts can be found at www.info2000.gc.ca. James Careless is a freelance writer based in Ottawa.



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Year 2000

A time for triage

What to fix when you can't fix everything

By Steve Hamon

The Year 2000 crisis has escalated to the point where the vast majority of businesses and government departments are physically unable to fix all of the Year 2000 errors in their computer systems According to the Gartner Group, by the end of 1999 less than 50 % of all organizations will have achieved full Year 2000 compliance in their application portfolios In other words, over half of all businesses and governments will fail to complete their Year 2000 changes in time Time will, quite simply, run out

The solution is not as simple as hiring teams of consultants and throwing these extra "bodies" at the problem. As Frederick Brooks proved so eloquently 20 years ago in his book The Mythical Man-Month – "Adding extra resources to a late software project simply makes it later" Things are no different today, and these consultants may not even be available as many organizations begin to compete for the same scarce resources

So what can you do? The solution is to refocus your team's efforts Conduct a triage-type of assessment of all your applications, and divide them into three categories

- Mission critical – those applications that absolutely must operate correctly or the organization will suffer irreparable damage (e g applications that create and print welfare or disability cheques A month or two delay here could actually cost lives)

The solution is not as simple as hiring teams of consultants and throwing these extra "bodies" at the problem

- Important – those applications that should be fixed, but won't stop the organization from performing its major functions (e g accounting applications Incorrect accounting entries are repairable, with some additional manual effort)
- Nice to have – those applications that are important as time savers, or job aids but which don't need to be in operation for the organization to perform efficiently (e g automated call routing systems You can always hire an extra receptionist or two)

Triage is often a very difficult activity Deciding which are the most critical applications can become political and personal, as all involved fight for their systems and their areas of responsibility Almost by definition, all applications are important, or they wouldn't still be in existence But remember, without triage you might not have anything that works on January 1 Isn't it better to ensure that at least your most critical applications are operable?

Your team must focus on repairing your truly mission critical applications These applications must work, and so this is where your repair team's time and energy must be spent

For the "important" and the 'nice to have" applications, the focus must switch

Continued on page 26

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COMPAQ



Time for triage

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from fixing the application code to finding quick, easy and straightforward workarounds that avoid the problem This allows the repair team to focus on the mission critical applications Then, once the critical applications have been successfully repaired and tested, your repair team can turn to resolving the problems in the less critical applications Even if this can't happen until after the year 2000 the impact of missing that stringent deadline will be as minor as possible, since your workarounds will be in place

It's time to become creative Consider these three innovative workarounds for your non-mission critical applications

Train people to ignore the incorrect data.

Users are, for the most part, intelligent creatures and can recognize obvious inconsistencies If a Year 2000 problem results only in obviously incorrect data being displayed to a user, then you can train the users to ignore the errors, rather than fixing the system.

Example:

In a government department concerned with old age pensions, the caseworkers use an inquiry system to provide automated, immediate access to the information on file This system contains a routine that determines the client's current age, for display on the caseworker's terminal The age is not stored in the file, it is calculated by the system based on the date of birth The only Year 2000 problem in this application is this calculation – as of January 1, 2000, the system will inform the caseworker that a person born in 1930 is not 70 years old but rather is -1930 years old

Instead of changing the code used to calculate age, the caseworkers can be trained to ignore the incorrect data and manually calculate the client's age

Fix the data, not the system.

Data can be "tweaked" to avoid causing Year 2000 processing problems Fixing the data is often easier than fixing the systems that use the data.

Example:

The automated machines at a processing plant execute their work based on automated plans These plans are date and time driven, and the activities performed by the machine are governed by the currently effective plan Each machine keeps five years worth of historical performance and throughput data against each plan, on a shift by shift basis

Just before the first shift on January 1 2000, the historical information is downloaded from the machines A one-time batch program reads each historical record in sequence and updates the effective date to be Jan 1, 2000 and the effective time range to be 1 second long For example, the oldest record is updated to be effective from Jan 1 2000 from 00 00 01 through 00 00 02, the next oldest from 00 00 02 to 00 00 03, and so on. A cross-reference report is created, mapping the old date, time and shift to the new, one second long time window on January 1, 2000

Data can be "tweaked" to avoid causing Year 2000 processing problems. Fixing the data is often easier than fixing the systems that use the data.

During the first shift on January 1, the historical data is replaced with the newly "tweaked" data From then on, all historical information is reported as if the processing had occurred in that one second window during the first shift in the year 2000 Historical reports, performance calculations ratios, trends etc are calculated as before, with no application code changes required to either the machines themselves or to any downstream reporting programs The actual dates and shifts are determined manually by comparing the one second time window with the cross-reference report created by the one-time batch program

Document it, then delete it.

The business process can be changed to minimize or even remove automation from your low volume, non-critical functions A master hardcopy document is used after the new millennium, and any data that will cause Year 2000 processing problems is removed from the system before those problems occur

Example:

At a large retail outlet, all bad debt accounts are managed through a custom-built bad debt accounting system. Due to Year 2000 problems, this application will not correctly record activity against these accounts, nor will it calculate interest amounts or penalties

Rather than making any code changes, the business process is changed In the fall of 1999, a final push is made to collect on these accounts and all possible bad debt write-offs are taken In late December 1999 one final month end accounting run for bad debt accounts is performed, to record any final updates A full set of detailed reports is produced from this run, along with a special detailed listing of these accounts This detailed listing becomes the manual Bad Debt Ledger At the end of this reporting run, all of the bad debt records are deleted from the automated system before the Year 2000 begins

On January 1, 2000, one bad debt summary record, (calculated during the final month end run in December) containing the totals for all bad debts is re-entered into the accounting systems, so that all accounting totals will be correct. The bad debt summary record is dated January 1, 2000, so it will not cause any Year 2000 processing problems

After January 1, 2000, any activity against these accounts is recorded manually against the individual accounts in the Bad Debt Ledger One monthly entry is made in the automated system against the summary record, to keep the totals correct No system code changes are required.

One final word of advice No application lives in complete isolation Be sure, before embarking on your triage exercise, that you have identified all interfaces to and from the mission critical applications You must either convert the systems on the other end of these interfaces at the appropriate time, or develop the necessary bridges between the applications

Steve Hamon is a consultant with DMR Group

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How high is high enough?

Choosing a high end computer

By James Careless

It's served you well, but its time is over, and now that once-impressive Pentium 75 which has graced your desktop for the last few years is destined for the 'recycle bin'. So what do you replace it with: the latest Pentium II with more processing power than NORAD or a more modest - and less expensive - model which can do your current work, with room to spare?

It's not an easy decision, whether you're an executive replacing just one PC, or a manager choosing hundreds of computers for an entire department. For the best answer, Government Computer turned to Ian Kirk, Technical Advisor with Science Informatics Professional Services Sector (SIPSS), a part of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

Ian Kirk knows microcomputers. He has to, because Kirk plays a key role in drawing up the federal government's National Master Standing Offer (NMSO). It's the process through which up to 75% percent of PCs are purchased by Ottawa, at an annual value of about $180 million.

"I run the NMSO Benchmark Testing Lab as well," Kirk tells GC. "We test for specification compliance, compatibility, and the actual value of the computers being offered to us by suppliers, based on how well they perform, their feature set, and their usability." The BTL tests everything from simple PCs right up to high-end servers.

Given this, Kirk is well-qualified to answer the question, "how high-end a computer do I really need?" His response - one which might startle some cost-crunched ADMs - is that the marketplace is recommending either the K6 (266 MHz) or the Pentium II (266 or 300 MHz) rather than save a few dollars on a less-advanced PC.

Now Ian Kirk is a self-admitted technology enthusiast, but that's not why he prefers the higher end. Instead he advocates the more advanced, better-equipped computer for strictly economic reasons: given current budgets, government departments have "to assume that they'll be using whatever computers they buy for the next 5 or 6 years." In that time, of course, all kinds of new software - and upgraded versions of current programs - will hit the market. Given past trends, it's safe to say that these programs will demand more memory and processing power than what's in use today.

"Every manager will remember the days of 286s and 386s, when we all went to Windows," Kirk recalls. "In an instant, the move to this environment [made obsolete] everything they'd bought previously." Although he doesn't expect the actual hardware demands of Windows to change much when Microsoft introduces Windows '98 or Windows NT 5.0, Ian Kirk still believes it makes much more sense to leave a lot of room for expansion, so that your computer doesn't get caught out

How much is enough?

But how high-end does someone have to go when they work in corporate communications, where the PCs are primarily used for word-processing? At a minimum, Ian Kirk advises an Intel Pentium or AMD K6 200 MHz with MMX capability, a two gigabyte hard drive, 32 Mb of RAM, and a video controller from a reputable manufacturer with 2 Mb of video RAM Anything less, and you're leaving yourself open to 'Future Software Shock', an experience akin to trying to run Netscape and Windows 3 11 on a 386 DX 25 If the system in question is to be used for home-based telecommuting, Kirk recommends considering other additions such as a high speed 24X variable speed CD-ROM, a Sound Blaster 16 compatible audio adapter, and a 56 K modem This last item might may some buyers nervous, given that there's currently no 56K standard on the market. However, Kirk says that users can guard against backing the wrong format by "selecting a modem manufacturer that commits to offering a free upgrade to the pending ITU communication standard" Such modems can be reprogrammed at a future date to match whatever standard is selected, so that users don't get caught out

He also advises taking a serious look at installing removable media drives such as a Zip or Jazz on your new system, to maximise the amount of data you can take away on a portable disk Before you make a final selection however, take a look at what's available on the market That's because storage capacity is going up For instance, "at Comdex, a company displayed a drive that can read and write 200 Mb worth of data on proprietary media, and in the same drive it can read and write 3 1/2 floppies," Kirk says. "This may well challenge current popular high-capacity portable formats" As for DVD? Despite all the hype surrounding this new data storage medium, Ian Kirk counsels caution Although he describes it as "a fantastic advance in CD technology," Kirk believes that the first DVD applications will be focused on the home entertainment market In other words, you won't be needing it for business soon

If a user is still intent on adding DVD to their new computer, "I would advise they choose what is known as a 'second generation drive'," he says "These are able to play standard audio CDs - surprisingly not mandatory for the DVD standard - and read CDR writeable disks It is also imperative that you purchase a high end video controller with a MPEG-2 hardware-based decoder on board I have seen inefficient video controllers running DVD that introduce so much pixelation as to make the whole expenditure a waste The audiophile should look for drives that have Digital/Analog converters that will support 96 kHz sampling"

True and false economies

Refitting an entire department with Pentium IIs is not a cheap proposition Faced with this, any savvy manager will look for ways to cut costs

This is understandable, says Ian Kirk However, it must be done the right way in order not to cause havoc down the line

One way to save money is to consider all companies, large and small, who have a good reputation for value and reliability and support "there seems to be a curious notion in some departments that only one segment in the computer industry can deliver that"

Another cost-cutting measure is to consider the Microsoft/Intel defined Net PC standard It's essentially a scaled unit – sans floppy and CD that is remotely managed "The emphasis of the Net PC is less on the hardware and more on its manageability over the network," comments Kirk "Through Desktop Management Interface (DMI) technology, the network administrator has total control over a uniformity of configurations, security, and asset management" But there is a downside to Net PCs Because they're not stand-alone machines, Net PCs may be perceived as 'lower status' than conventional PCs

The bottom line: buy for tomorrow, but buy smart

Taken as a whole, Ian Kirk's advice points the way for intelligent PC purchases Look ahead, he advises and don't scrimp unless you know exactly

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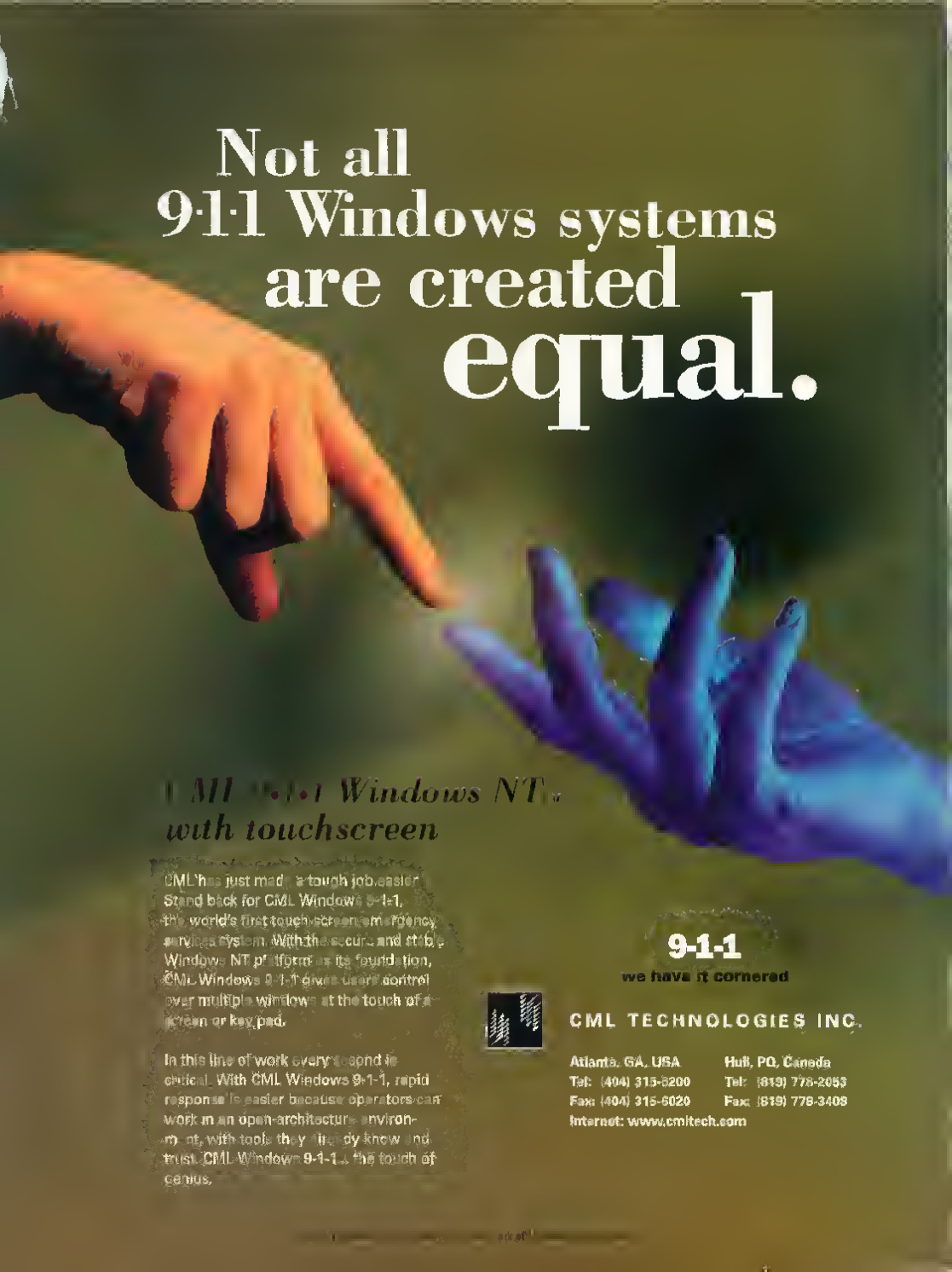
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Making connections

An interview with Phil McLellan

By Ross Hutchison

Phil McLellan, assistant deputy minister for Government Telecommunications and Informatics Services spoke recently with Government Computer.

GC: Last year you indicated that the core or 'inner ring' of GTIS' activities will be to serve Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC) well. Is this still the case?

McLellan: Yes. Serving PWGSC is our primary strategic focus. This is partly because of the strong demand within the PWGSC business lines for new and improved systems.

Big things are happening in each of the areas. Government Operational Services demands relate to the Financial Information Strategy with the needs for accrual accounting and better reporting to parliament. Public Service reform is requiring major changes to Compensation Systems. Supply Operations need systems to support an increase in delegation of authority as well as the new benefits-driven procurement approach. Real Property Service has major initiatives related to alternate forms of delivery in maintenance that require system support.

On top of all that, Year 2000 compliance is a major undertaking and several of the PWGSC systems are mission-critical.

GC: This must be really concentrating the Application Management Services (AMS) activities.

McLellan: Yes. AMS will be concentrating all of its resources on PWGSC and will have its hands full. They, in turn, will need outside help to deliver because of the huge demand.

GC: You also said that the next 'ring' of your activities would be to provide common services. How has that evolved?

McLellan: We are active in two ways, as a broker and as a deliverer.

What we look for in either case are opportunities where there is consensus that a common service or aggregated approach makes sense and that GTIS can perform a legitimate role in adding value without competing with commercial alternatives.

A key area where we had great success as a broker is in the telecom area where we are now dealing with the new deregulated environment. We have just finished establishing a Telecom Supply Arrangement and the first contracts are signed. By aggregating the requirements and leveraging the new competitive environment we were able to effect double digit percentage savings. As well, both the departments and suppliers like the process.

GC: What about areas where GTIS is a service deliverer?

McLellan: There is still a lot of activity. The take-up of our frame relay service has been excellent. GENet is also widely used for remote locations and also for larger departments which use it as a gateway between their network and provincial networks. Our data centre services continue to provide mainframe and other services to twenty departments, producing savings to the Crown through consolidation and optimisation of Crown assets.

GC: How do you select areas to get involved in?

McLellan: On the optional side, we emphasize areas where there is full sponsorship and a fully accepted role for GTIS. Electronic commerce facilitation services areas, such as messaging, directories and security functionality like PKI and authentication are in very strong demand and we can really act as a coordinating and enabling agent.

We are very successful with our Enquiries Canada activities. We operate the Canada Web Site and provide PubliService, an internal Bulletin Board service and operate Reference Canada for access to information by the general public.

GC: Is alternative service delivery of some existing activities still a priority?

McLellan: Yes, it is. We have a strategy to consolidate, rationalise and then consider an alternative approach, where competitive commercial alternatives exist.



GC: Which areas have you looked at?

McLellan: The largest area we are considering is our data centre operations We have issued an RFI and are analysing the responses I am hopeful, if appropriate, that a deal could be done before March 31 1998, although that's tight

GC: Are there any you have consumated?

McLellan: There are two, although of different models. We have a license agreement with the CGI Group related to the Common Departmental Financial System They are marketing the product to provinces and agencies and we get part of the revenue So far, they are active in Quebec.

As well, we have a contract with Drake Personnel for overload services for regional cheque production That business has peaks and valleys for such products as GST Rebate and CSBs Drake looks after the peaks

We want to have more alternate service delivery arrangements but in many cases GTIS doesn't own the business. Network management is a good example That s where prior consensus with the client community is essential

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GC: How does the work of the Network Planning Committee fit in?

McLellan: Under this initiative a cooperative of five or six medium sized departments has formed They are interested in getting ATM services to accommodate their bandwidth demands In this case, PWGSC is just one of the cooperative members As well GTIS will handle the procurement Unlike previous telecom initiatives, we are not counting on or dependent upon the large telecom users' participation They can go on their own today but the door is open for them to join later if they choose

GC: You have mentioned a funding issue related to service delivery What is that?

McLellan: Previously we delivered a mix of mature and new services and had the opportunity to cross-subsidize the new ones Today when we are a broker only for large volume services such as telecom, we do a good job, save the departments large dollars but do not reap much benefit ourselves We, therefore, do not have the flexibility when it comes to funding new services development.

A few months ago I raised this issue with the Deputy Ministers on the TIMS Committee

GC: Is that what initiated the TIMS interest in common services?

McLellan: Yes, in part Also, their three Enterprise thrusts – business services, people services and information services – were cross departmental in scope and generated a great deal of interest in common infrastructure relative to the funding and governance questions

They identified that there was a need for a robust, well planned infrastructure to serve these areas I made them aware that the old model doesn t work and that we need a new arrangement for funding and governance

GC: Can you speculate on GTIS' role coming out of this activity?

McLellan: There are areas with no argument such as the Telecom Supply Arrangement. There is also renewed interest in infrastructure that is providing improved information to the public There is almost a political interest in providing a single point of contact with improved search tools initially for the information and then for transactions Pressure is coming from the public as well as provinces and municipalities. Frankly, some provinces are more fleet of foot in this issue and are ahead of us.

One result we can anticipate is that it will provide some much needed clarity for GTIS future direction

Ross Hutchison of Ross Hutchison & Associates specializes in market studies of information technology in Canadian governments. He can be reached at 905-844 4069

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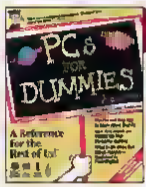
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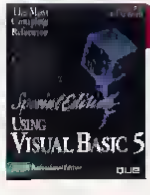
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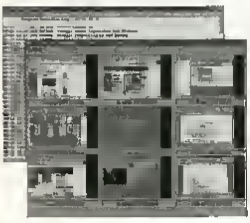
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GC Updates

Continued from page 14

objectives, had more senior management involvement and were broken down into manageable components. However, in house projects need to be improved to provide the assurance that they will meet their clients' needs on time and on budget. That was the opinion of the Auditor General in his December report.

The government has embarked on a number of in-house information technology projects in its drive to respond to the needs of taxpayers and reduce costs. The Auditor General examined three of these projects, namely Revenue Canada's Standardised Accounting and Corporate Tax System, the innovative Strategis website project of Industry Canada and the Self-Serve Systems run by Human Resources Development Canada. The latter project is directed primarily toward dispensing employment insurance information.

The report identifies the risks associated with failing to record and track time and actual project costs. "Without this kind of tracking, projects can take longer, cost more and deliver less," says Denis Desautels. The Auditor General estimates that each project will cost taxpayers between $50 million and $100 million.

Ironically the government does not apply to itself the performance measures it demands of its contractors. When the government contracts out computer systems development work, it always demands costs and schedule performance measures from the contractor. However, the three in-house projects that were developed primarily by government staff were not subject to these same performance requirements.

While these initiatives were geared toward improving service to the public, in two cases, technology solutions were introduced prior to proper identification of end-users and their needs, claims the Auditor General. "Clients should be properly identified and involved throughout a project – from the planning stage to final implementation," said Desautels. "Understanding the client is the first step of good planning."

Information at www.oag-bvg.gc.ca

Three tools for Year 2000

Platinum Technology, Inc. has released version 4.0 of its TransCentury Calendar Routines, a Year 2000 date logic conversion tool. This upgrade provides customers with an even faster date logic solution by automating much of the remediation process. With just over two years remaining until the turn of the century, Platinum claims organisations are selecting the time-saving date logic, or windowing, technique over field expansion methods.

"An effective way to streamline today's Year 2000 remediation projects is through the use of automation tools," said Dick Heiman, research manager at International Data Corporation. "This announcement of TransCentury Calendar Routines enhanced functionality should be welcome news to large organizations looking for a way to accelerate Year 2000 remediation."

The company says its new version of TransCentury eases remediation by ensuring that faulty date logic found in common "IF" statements can be quickly repaired in COBOL and PL/1 programs. This function alone typically addresses from 30 to 70 percent of an organization's program logic remediation.

Meanwhile Ottawa-based APG Solutions and Technologies has unveiled new software called PC/Y2000 that it says will ease Year 2000 conversions for personal computers. The software analyses all data in a PC environment and creates reports which identify the elements that need to be converted.

APG president André Poirier said, "In our opinion this tool constitutes the only coherent and efficient software which prepares personal computers in a client/server environment for the year 2000."

And from Markham's Cybermation Inc. comes a product for testing and integration of year 2000 dates and changes. ESP Dateline 2000 Test Bench provides an integrated test environment which the company says is an exact replica of production environments. Entire applications or individual jobs and programs are easy to verify and integrate in a real-life test to ensure integrity.

The testing and integration phase can consume 40 percent or more of an entire year 2000 change effort and many organisations have not even started yet. ESP Dateline 2000 Test Bench speeds users through this critical stage because multiple system dates can be tested at the same time, without the requirement for a dedicated test CPU, resetting the system time clock or for repeated IPLs.

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DECUS (Digital Equipment Computer Users)
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Contact: YS Yoong (613) 769-1749
Electronic Commerce Canada
Contact: ECC c/o The Willow Group (613) 237-2324
Folio User Group Ottawa-Hull (FUGOH)
Contact: Gerry Lager (613) 990-2755
Hewlett Packard Users Group
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Info. Resource Management Assoc. of Canada (IRMAC)
Contact: Vishwa Surajram (416) 971-9800 or (613) 239-4903
Information System Security Association (ISSA)
Contact: Yvonne Jason (613) 566-7017
Information Technology Association of Canada (ITAC)
Contact: Gaylen Duncan (416) 602-8345
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Institute of Certified Management Consultants of Ontario (ICMCO)
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The Institute of Technical Editors (ITE)
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February 3-6
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Electronic Commerce Canada: Electronic Service Delivery

February 11-12
Ottawa Congress Centre
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Society caught in the web

Governments will face sticky issues

by Thomas B. Riley

New digital technologies have become almost invisible in our society and commonplace in their usage, but the social changes that these technologies are bringing have only begun to surface. New technologies are impacting on the job market and the way we work. A few of these shifts can be identified at this point in time.

It is becoming evident that cultural differences between nations and governments drive not only the legal approaches but also the content of this changing media. Different governments, driven by their own unique legal, cultural economic and political ethic, are attempting, with varying degrees of success, to control content. While there have been many arguments posited that the dominance of American culture is creating an unwanted uniformity around the world, there is much evidence to suggest that the contrary is happening. Although the new technologies, especially the Internet are global in nature, regional voices are continuing to become stronger. Witness the ethnic conflicts around the world as a manifestation of the desire for maintaining racial or ethnic identity.

For example, recent surveys on the population of the Internet suggest that there are now approximately 86 million people using the Internet (NUA Surveys, November 12, 1997). An analysis of the statistics coming out on the demographics of the Internet worldwide, but especially in the United States and Canada, shows that the people who use the Net are very much reflective of our modern society. People are using the Internet as a tool to enhance the interests that drive them in their daily and professional lives. Many also use it for political activism, to get government information, or to have services delivered electronically. Evidence is surfacing that suggests the Internet will not replace television. Rather, it will evolve as a medium unique unto itself, but not necessarily create a world alien to the one we currently occupy.

One worry is that, while the Internet is a ubiquitous medium, spanning the globe and connecting millions of computers, it is also an isolating technology. People connect with other people in cyberspace but, often as not, it is a solitary medium engaged in by an individual sitting alone in front of a terminal, removed from the experience of group interaction. The dynamics of one-on-one interaction in a physical environment are far different from interaction with faceless identities. There are benefits to the latter, such as being exposed to a diversity of cultures around the world and not tagging the invisible person at the other end by gender, sex, race or age. But the problem goes deeper and could result in serious repercussions for society if there are millions of people whose contact with society is mostly through the computer. Television has contributed significantly to the decline of community activities and volunteer groups, according to studies conducted in North America. The Internet, and the possible convergence of the TV and the Internet, could compound this even further.

This phenomenon has raised anxieties beyond the early concerns about the divisions in our society leading to the "information rich" and the "information poor". While we already know that we are evolving a society that will be divided by the degree that one is computer literate, there are even deeper concerns surfacing about the negative social impacts for societies.

There has been more information generated in the 1990's than all the information produced prior to 1990, in the history of the world. We are literally awash with information. Yet, this rise in the production of information has not brought with it a concomitant rise in literacy. In fact, studies in the United States and Canada have shown not only increasing illiteracy in the general population but an appalling lack of knowledge at the university level about historic events, our political leaders or system of government. This has educators and thinkers questioning the wisdom of rushing to put computers into the schools, when the answer lies in how the content is presented and organized. Many object to the theory that a combination of the television and access to the Internet in schools will offer all the information a student could possibly need. But will this bring knowledge? Information, presented in pieces and organized to illustrate its meaning, can then be used to formulate a

knowledge base This has been the role of a good curriculum presented by a good teacher The rise of illiteracy itself needs to be addressed by getting to the root causes of the illiteracy not, say many educators, by putting more computers into the classroom This is not to say that all these new technologies should not be used to enhance our activities in the workplace the schools and the home. Rather, it means that we need to take stock of the meaning of technology and infuse it with the spirit of life that humans bring to technology

There is a notion abroad in the world that these new technologies, by their mere existence and emergence into society, offer answers and bring with them wisdom It is only individuals, with foresight, intelligence, imagination and creativity that bring wisdom.

The Internet is a revolutionary medium that has afforded the opportunity for millions of people to open themselves to a rich panoply of information and services. The benefits of the Internet are legion, as anyone who has used it will realize But it is equally important to understand the issues which it is raising for society We can see that there is a new political philosophy emerging around the Internet which we can refer to as "cyberism". Subscribers to this philosophy passionately believe that the Net will find its own way of dealing with the problems emerging in their particular society There is no doubt that, from this new medium, the politics of cyberspace will take wider and wider hold.There is already extensive activism on the Internet, in which groups and individuals take online actions to lobby all levels of government,from the local, to state/provincial, national and international The politics of cyberspace are beginning to impinge on the real political world The question becomes to what degree will the young Internet citizens, the netizens, of today change the political world of the future?

What is needed is intelligent debate and discussion about the directions that we as a society are taking Future columns will attempt to present a substantive background of fact and analysis, in which readers can decide for themselves the future impact that emerging technologies will have on the world

Thomas B Riley is President of Riley Information Services Inc , international specialists in the creation of public policy on information issues

How high is high

Continued from page 30

what you're doing By doing so, you can rest assured that your hardware will last as long as it has to, and do the work that needs to be done

This said, however, he does offer a ray of hope for financially-challenged managers, which is that high end system prices are rapidly coming down In fact, Kirk notes that they're coming into what he calls the 'sweet spot' price range of $2,500 to $3,000 each. "That's the same price 486s were demanding when they first came out" he notes

The bottom line it makes sense to buy high-end now, so that what you buy will be adequate for years to come

James Careless is a freelance writer based in Ottawa

Buyer beware

When you acquire PCs for government use, be sure that you're getting what you pay for, warns Ian Kirk. Unfortunately there are a few NMSO vendors who take license in 'down- costing' their products after they have been bid and benchmarked. The most common example is to complete our testing with expensive, fast, well behaved RAM, then ship the customer lesser quality, cheaper RAM"

"This practice violates the terms and conditions of the NMSO' he adds "We need participation from our client departments to help scrutinise their deliverles" In other words, if you suspect something, let PWGSC know! You can find out more information about the NMSO benchmark testing report at *HTTP://NSTL.SRVGC.CA*



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Separating wheat from chaff

How to evaluate proposals - part two

by Michael Asner

In many organizations, the reasons for rejecting a specific proposal are straightforward either the proposal did not satisfy one or more of the mandatory conditions or the proposal failed to score sufficient points to be considered for the award There are other reasons which can be invoked the business that submitted the proposal was not responsible -the evaluators judged that there was a high risk that the business that submitted the proposal could not complete the work on time and within budget

Some jurisdictions do more than provide examples They define the specific reasons for rejecting a proposal In stating the formal reasons the organization removes the appearance of arbitrary actions.

The contracting authority may reject a bid or proposal which has been received prior to the closing time only where:

it is not submitted in the required form,

- there are significant omissions of required information,
- a bid or proposal is not signed as required in the request for bids or proposals,
- the required bid security in the required form is not provided,
- the bid or proposal has conditions attached which are not authorized by the request for bids or proposals;
- the bid or proposal fails to meet one or more standards specified in the request for bids or proposals; or
- there is substantial evidence that, pursuant to the evaluation criteria contained in the request for bids or proposals, a bidder or proponent would be unable to carry out the contract as specified.

Rejecting all proposals

Occasionally, all proposals are rejected This obviously should be a rare occurrence caused by unusual and unanticipated circumstances.The Alaska Procurement Code 7 contains a list of some reasons

After the opening of bids or proposals or after notice of intent to award but before award, all bids or proposals may be rejected in whole or in part by the chief procurement officer or the head of a purchasing agency issuing the solicitation Reasons for rejection include the following

(1) the supplies, services, or construction being procured are no longer required

(2) ambiguous or otherwise inadequate specifications were part of the solicitation;

(3) the solicitation did not provide for consideration of all factors of significance to the state,

(4) prices exceed available money and it would not be appropriate to adjust quantities to accommodate available money;

(5) in open competition, may have been collusive, or may have been submitted in bad faith, or

(6) the award is not in the best interests of the state

What are the steps in an evaluation?

Most evaluation processes are similar The proposals are received, copies are produced, if required, and the proposals (or sections of the proposals) are distributed to the evaluators

- Receive and distribute proposals to evaluators
- Satisfy mandatory requirements
- Evaluate proposals
- Attend demonstrations
- Determine score and ranking of each proposal
- Perform cost analysis
- Determine overall ranking
- Attend demonstrations
- Check references
- Negotiate contracts
- Final selection

The first determination by the project manager or RFP officer is whether the proposal has complied with each of the mandatory terms and conditions If it has not it may be eliminated from further consideration In some jurisdictions, proposals that do not comply with each of the mandatory terms and conditions stated in the RFP must be eliminated from further consideration in other jurisdictions, they may be eliminated at the discretion of the procurement officer

If the organization is handling cost as a separate issue, then the cost proposal is separated from the technical proposal If technical experts are being used to evaluate certain features, then they are given only those sections of the proposals which deal with their issues

The proposals are then evaluated and a score is computed for each of the predefined criteria Proposals may be ranked and only those capable of providing an acceptable solution are evaluated further.

More detailed evaluations may incorporate demonstrations or presentations, site visits, and reference checks. Once the evaluators have determined the best proposal, contract negotiation is started. Failure to negotiate an acceptable contract within a predefined time is reason to reject a proposal and consider the next best. In some jurisdictions, "best and final offer" is used to permit those few suppliers judged capable of satisfying the requirements the opportunity to revise their original proposal. In this way, deficiencies can be corrected and a better solution provided.

The main objective of this cumbersome process is to determine the winner, not to rank all the proposals in order. While careful attention must be given to the top two or three, it matters less whether a given proposal ends up fifth or seventh in ranking. Knowing this, some organizations only evaluate the most difficult areas of each proposal to see which suppliers are to be fully evaluated.

Methods of evaluating the proposals will differ based on the goods and services involved, the number of proposals received and the complexity of the project. Some organizations have standardized the evaluation process.

Definition of a winning proposal

Whatever specific criteria a particular evaluation process may incorporate, most evaluators look for the following in a proposal.

Clear evidence that the supplier fully understands the requirements.

An approach which appears technically sound, achievable within constraints explained by the vendor, and offered in enough detail to provide evidence of these characteristics.

Clear evidence that the supplier can deliver the expected results by mobilizing qualified staff capable management, and an experienced organization.

Michael Asner provides consulting help and offers workshops to government on creating effective RFPs, and to IT firms on writing winning proposals. His latest book, the Request for Proposal Handbook, is distributed by the Government Computer Bookstore (613-789-6431). He can be reached at 604-530-7881 or by email at asner@compuserve.com.

CIPS Ottawa
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ANNOUNCEMENT

The *Ottawa Chapter* of the
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is holding it's monthly meeting on
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Our dirty little secret

The case of the missing strategy

by Charles Belford

Happy New Year! You have three minutes to find the memo detailing the department's roll-up of IT requirements for FY98/99 before meeting with the ADM, Finance and Admin to discuss IT allocation. You've already fallen behind in the planning cycle and now you've got to decide how to spend five million of the department's capital budget on IT.

There's a wee problem however. The memo on IT requirements identifies only the software and hardware requirements of the department and these total over 12 million. But that's not the problem. Well, it's not the most critical problem. That problem has to do with information management strategies. Specifically, the problem has to do with the absence of such strategies in your IT plan. Uh-huh, that problem.

The good news is that the ADM wouldn't know an IT or an IM strategy if they fell on her head. She's just worried about the money. And because the department doesn't tie IT allocation to program development strategies (much less an IT strategy), the money thing is easy. Who do you love? Who got a lot last year? Is the Minister's office OK? Who's whining especially loudly these days? Hey, you've got an allocation strategy, right? It might not be as business-based as you'd like, but neither is the department's planning.

Your problem is that foolish crisis of conscience you had last summer after a couple of directors mentioned that they needed to expand IT planning around their requirements to cover more than "stuff." They needed stuff, of course. But they needed more from you. They didn't know how to articulate their additional requirements all that clearly. One director wanted to know how to better use their Internet connections to service their NGO community. Another wanted to create a database to support some cross-functional prospects between his division and two others. A third one was dreaming of some on-line tools to upgrade their division's value-added but had no idea what this would require.

Well, what happened? You provided a sympathetic ear and said you'd look into it. Sure.

Trouble is, you don't have anyone to send up to talk to them. Secondly, the department's focus is on cost-savings and this stuff on its face is about enhanced service. Finally, IT's role in the departmental planning process is quick and dirty. Here's your capital budget. Where's your list of "stuff?" The idea that the management committee might reject IT's plan as insufficient is preposterous. They've never asked about the department's IT strategy, much less an IM strategy, and they aren't likely to ask this year either. They think IT is about "stuff" so why upset the applecart, right?

And so it goes. IT planning plays into management's level of IT maturity and the department's planning assumptions about business and IT. IT managers rightly point out that you can't create a mature IT plan in a departmental planning process that is not business-driven. If the department is incapable of identifying discrete program delivery strategies and operational plans to realize them, how can you develop an IT or an IM strategy? Fact is, you can't.

Where a department only pays lip service to "Doing more with less." The dirty little secret isn't that IT planning is suboptimal. The dirty little secret is that business planning is suboptimal and that, as a result, so is IT/IM planning.

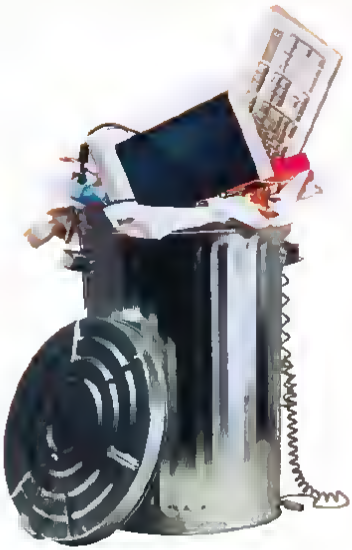
Charles Belford, formerly a senior executive in the federal public service, is president of Network Environment Associates. He can be reached by telephone at (613) 828-1775 or by e-mail at cbelford@netwrk.com

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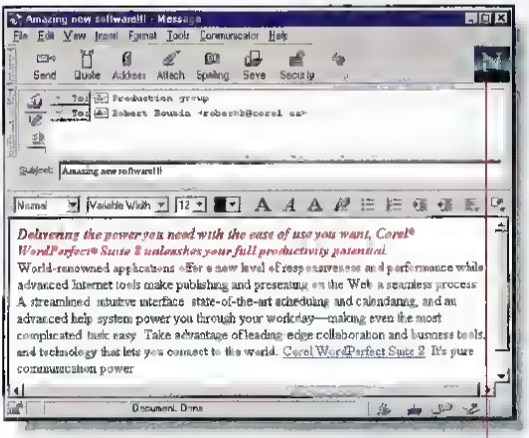
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Fortune, **May 26 1997**

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Wall Street Journal **July 10, 1997**

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